

# A Discourse Analysis of Selected Gender Biased Dialogues from The Movie 'Dangal'

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## Abstract

*Entertainment as a medium conveys the cultural norms, traditions, values, art, music, technology, fashion, storytelling, drama, movie, politics, history etc. which addresses the mass audience in our Indian Society. We are going to discuss about the movie 'Dangal' and the language used in it which brings to light the gender inequality through their conversations that are strongly prevalent in those times. It is very important to cite Michelle Lazar's gloss on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which conveys 'a critical perspective on unequal social relations sustained through language use.' Hence we have made use of the conversational analysis as a method to analyse the pertinent gender issues. Today, we live in a deeply fragmented world, where gender inequity is on rise, wish lines with references to 'figure' and their ilk had been replaced. It's true that with time, things change. We can notice that in recent times, the Indian government is trying to raise awareness on the social issues, debating them, ensuring policies for gender equality, which is one of the seventeen goals to transform our country. It is high time that the society responds positively to gender equality by paving a path for the future girls to follow the paths of Geeta and Babita who not only defeated the belief systems of the ignorant villagers, but triumphed in their real lives inspiring the younger generation to pursue their dreams. With this as a brief introduction, this article throws light on the awareness and assertions of gender equality.*

## Introduction

Entertainment as a medium conveys the cultural norms, technology, fashion, storytelling, drama, music, art, music, politics, patriarchal traditions etc. which addresses the mass audience in Indian Society.

In our media and advertisements, the focus is mostly misguided from the core issues and most often women's body is projected in an unhealthy image to gain mass attention. Recently, a poster caught my attention which showed the legs of a model to advertise the furniture of a company. The legs of the model sitting on a couch had no relation to the furniture. Interestingly, while this picture angered me, I noticed many men throwing their lustful gazes to that poster!

In 1990's eve teasing was considered very irritating but mostly harmless. Today, we live in a deeply fragmented world, where gender inequity is on rise, wish lines with references to 'figure' and their ilk had been replaced.

It's true that with time, things change. We can notice that in recent times, the Indian government is trying to raise awareness on the social issues, debating them, ensuring policies for gender equality, which is one of the seventeen goals to transform our country. It has come up with a policy

named Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) which is passed in some states but this alone is not sufficient to tackle the deep-rooted gender disparities. A Government of India enterprise, Air India declared a chivalrous act to reserve 6 front seats for women passengers but it is ineffective in our path towards gender equality.

For Indian society by and large, the idea of a modern independent woman is still disturbing. The burden of a single status amplifies in the case of women. It is a fact unknown that bachelor girls have worst stories to share which they had experienced while looking for a rented house when they had to reside in cities away from their homes in order to pursue their higher education or to work in different sectors. The magnitude of this issue is much more than we ought to have known. Individual landlords have dominating view which is biased against women particularly, bachelor women, enquiring about their parental presence, morally judging them for the clothes they wear, by restricting visitors and sometimes these women may even get slut shamed.

So, it does raise pertinent questions on independent women who reside alone or loiter or travel or watch movies alone in our country. They are told that they should always glance furtively around their surroundings, dress

conservatively when they step out alone from their home in order to feel secure and safe. Rabindranath Tagore in his poem states, 'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high'. In this very first line, he prays to the Almighty that his countrymen should be free from any fear of oppression or forced compulsion. He wishes that everyone in his country should hold their heads high in dignity. In other words, according to him, in a truly free country every person should be fearless and should have a sense of self dignity. But, it is a miserable situation in our country where most of the citizens (especially women) walk in the shadow of fear every day! Borrowing a leaf from him, in the end, his poem also reflects on about gender equality and how one should respect women and share an equalspace with them. This equality will not dent any man but only makes the world a better place when the women's mind is truly without fear.

Given the sheer weight to India's patriarchy and conservatism, creative thinking needs to arise in order to encourage the emergence of a new breed of gender sensitive men who may be capable of teaching, fathers to sons and one generation to the other, to respect women not only in the privacy of their family settings but also in the wider settings such as society and in public places. The younger boys need to learn from their fathers about women having an inviolable right to space and assist dignity. Only then, the creeping moral rot within India can be arrested and the country can become egalitarian.

A very well-known maxim which is repeatedly told by parents who have girl wards is not to engage themselves with strangers in public spaces. However, approaching familiar men, older men, and married men is also quite awkward at times since marriage as a system in itself has become a mirage.

We are living at the crossroads of many cultural intersections today. But the archaic ideas of a respectable woman continue to remain etched in the Indian subconscious. Manasi Kirloskar, fifth generation businesswoman when asked this question if she had been a single male heir to the Toyota Kirloskar Empire would the world of business and their own organisation perceive her differently? She replied, 'Gender was never an issue and finally I have been accepted for being me. I have to be myself. I don't like to hide my feminine side. Many women

like her have indeed evolved and redefined themselves at a pace that our society hasn't yet discovered.'

With this as a brief introduction, this paper throws light on the awareness and assertion in the concept of gender equality.

### Data and Method

In this study, we have selected conversations from the movie 'Dangal' which serves as the primary data. We made use of conversational analysis as a method to analyse which corners gender issues. Conversational analysis comes under discourse analysis.

### Conversational Analysis

A clear value of Conversational Analysis is the search for invariant regularities in the way speech is exchanged or uttered. The strength (and weakness) of Conversational Analysis therefore, can be found in the ability to make clever inferences about brief fragments of social interaction without having to describe the conditions that made it possible to record the fragments, and without having to specify whether the research analyst was present at the time and if he or she were able to observe or personally know about the participant.

The language used in the movie 'Dangal' brings to light the gender inequality through their conversations that are strongly prevalent in those times. At this juncture, it is very important to cite Michelle Lazar's gloss on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which conveys 'a critical perspective on unequal social relations sustained through language use.'

The Plot of 'Dangal':

Dangal is a biography of a real-life patriotic fighter Mahavir Singh Phogat who raises his daughters and evolves them into World Class Fighters. The movie begins with a crotch brawl between Mahavir (Aamir Khan) and his colleague who was also former wrestler, thus embalming the terrific Dangal Theme, discovering Mahavir's past life of a Wrestler. Mahavir admires to make his dreams come true by his sons but on contrary, four daughters take birth. They come with a complaint of beating down a boy in their locality. Hence Mahavir hopes they would be future Wrestlers. So he trains his daughters Geeta and Babita, thus proving they're no less than a professional male wrestler. After a long struggle, Geeta enters the National

level Wrestling and acquires victory. When she is up to the Internationals, she opts to get trained from the NSA (National Sports Academy) where a coach mis-trains Geeta, due to which she deliberately fails every match she attempts. Her sister Babita also attains an age to get into Wrestling. Now, Mahavir plans to train both by his own norms. Finally, Gita defeats an Australian Wrestler by following the predominant path of her father, not of the coach. The movie is par excellent, enriches Women Empowerment in the Nation.

### Discussion

In order to analyse the data, selected dialogues from the film have been extracted. Dialogues were narrowed down to extracts with pre-selected lines which consistently highlight a meaning or structure within the context of a particular scene from the film. Ten sets of extracts are used in this study which reveals the social norms concerning women in the society and the language used to criticise those who do not adhere to the existing norms.

### Dialogues

The first extract happens in a small village named Balali, District Bhiwani, and Haryana State in India. Mahavir Singh Phogat works in an office and also works part time at a local wrestling ring and he is very talented in terms of wrestling and its techniques. He couldn't take part in Olympics nor win gold to India. Therefore, he had hopes that his future son will win gold for the country. His wife Daya Shobha bears him 4 girl children in a row which upsets him and finally he locks away all his wrestling equipment and medals in a trunk, seeing no future ahead.

#### Extract 1

*Mahavir Singh Phogat (M), Daya Shobha (D).*

Mahavir:

What I couldn't do, our *son* will do. He will win gold for our country.

Daya:

I couldn't give you a *son*.

M:

But only a *boy* can fulfil my dream.

Mahavir hoped for a son and since his wife bore him 4 girl children, he loses hope. It revealed his low mentality

towards the girl children. He and his wife heeded to the advices of the villagers, neighbours, priests and elders on how to conceive a boy child but they were of no use. His wife Daya feels guilty that she couldn't give him a son. But Mahavir is very adamant that only a boy can fulfil his dream which a daughter can't. The mentality of Mahavir shows that he had misconceptions about a specific gender. His patriarchal nature is very predominant in this first extract.

The second extract is shown after 13-14 years. One fine day, Mahavir's neighbours having two sons complain that Geeta and Babita the daughters of Mahavir had beaten up their sons who were much elder to the girls.

#### Extract 2

*Neighbours, Mahavir Singh Phogat (M), Daya Shobha (D).*

Neighbours:

We are letting them go because they are *girls*.

M:

Gold medal is ultimately a Gold medal and it does not matter whether a *boy* wins it or a *girl*. From now on, our *daughters* will do no household chores as they'll only wrestle.

D:

Wrestling is for *boys* only.

M:

You think your *girls* are any lesser than *boys*?

D:

I've never ever seen *girls'* wrestle.

What will the villagers say?

What if the *girls* break their hands and legs?

M: We'll fix them.

D: Don't ruin the *girls'* lives for your passion.

The tremendous act of the two girls Geeta and Babita beating up their neighbour's sons revealed the trait of wrestling which was in their father Mahavir and so he feels very happy about them. For the very first time, the idea of having daughters doesn't bother him. From that very moment, he determines to mould them in the sport and starts to take pride in them. But the parents of the two boys who were beaten up tell Mahavir that they were leaving the matter without creating any fuss because they were just girls. The mother's role is well portrayed where her innocence is revealed as she thinks that wrestling is only

for boys and hence tells her husband that she has never seen girls wrestle. Mahavir backs his daughters and makes a very powerful statement 'You think your *girls* are any lesser than *boys*?' from this we understand the drastic shift in the thought process of Mahavir as if he gained sudden some enlightenment unlike the Extract 1.

When Geeta the eldest daughter is ready to compete, Mahavir takes her to another village for wrestling. Mahavir coaches his girls and was a very tough coach. He began their training at 5am every morning. He maintained their diet and restricted any street-food, spicy food and made them to exercise rigorously. When Geeta and Babita complained about their hair being ruined due to the training in sand - he calls for a barber and cuts their hairshort.

### Extract 3

*Head of the wrestling ring.*

Head of the wrestling ring:

*Girls in the wrestling arena? Will you have me sin at this age?*

The mentality of the head of the wrestling ring is very evident in this context. For him, making a girl enter into the wrestling ring is equal to sin. This highlights the cultural norms of the society and the supreme patriarchal power in earlier times.

This is a dialogue between Omkar's dad and Mahavir.

### Extract 4

*Omkar's dad.*

Omkar's dad:

It was bad enough that you are making the *girls* wrestle. Now you want them to fight *boys*?

Omkar is the nephew of Mahavir and a very close cousin to his daughters. Omkar's dad doesn't comment anything when Mahavir trains his two older girls to be wrestlers. But when he comes to know that Mahavir intends to compete against boys, he contradicts him not to do such a thing. Even when he knew the demands of the sport, he couldn't digest girls fighting boys which shows the same patriarchal notions which Mahavir himself had had once

Mahavir notices that his daughters Geeta and Babitawere physically weak andso he encourages them to eat non-vegetarian.

### Extract 5

*DayaShobha (D), Mahavir Singh Phogat (M), Omkar (O).*

D: You are training the *girls* to wrestle. I didn't say anything. But I will not allow you to cook chicken in my kitchen!

M: Try and understand. Wrestlers need protein. You want your *girls* to be weak wrestlers?

M: Omkar!

O: Yes, uncle!

M: Do you know how to cook?

O: No, uncle!

M: Then learn to cook.

Omkar cooks on the stove under his uncle's assistance.

Though Daya obeys her husband in training their daughters to be wrestlers, she retaliates when she had to cook chicken. She opposes to cook and to give space for them to cook in her kitchen. Even when Mahavir tries to explain her, her word prevails. Finally, Mahavir had to seek help from his nephew Omkar to cook chicken for them. This is quite a dramatic scene since in those days; forget about cooking, men were not even allowed to enter the kitchen. But for the sole reason for his daughters to be physically fit, Mahavir with the help of Omkar accomplishes the task of cooking protein. This action of Mahavir, broke the barrier of the existing stereotypical notion that only women should cook.

The following are a few dialogues where the villagers respond/react contrarily to Mahavir.

The first setting is that of in a barber shop. The barber while attending a customer states that girls were meant to cook in the kitchen and not to be wrestlers. In the second setting, the villagers of Ballali react in the similar manner to the barber and mock Mahavir by calling him different names. They even go the extent in commenting the way girls get dressed in shorts while wrestling though the daughters of Mahavir covered themselves in full length. According to the men in that village women should be restricted to kitchen, do household chores, wear a ghunghat and speak in a low voice.

### Extract 6

*Barber, Person 1, Person 2 and Person 3.*

In the barber shop

Barber:

*Girls* are best suited for the kitchen not for wrestling.

Person 1:

Mahavir has gone mad.

Person 2:

Not mad, he's become shameless.

Person 3:

He is getting the *girls* to wear shorts and fight.

Extract 6 explains how the society reacts and hampers the restriction of girl empowerment. The first setting is that of in a barber shop. The barber while attending a customer states that girls were meant to cook in the kitchen and not to be wrestlers. In the second setting, the villagers of Ballali react in the similar manner to the barber and mock Mahavir by calling him different names. They even go the extent in commenting the way girls get dressed in shorts while wrestling though the daughters of Mahavir covered themselves in full length. According to the men in that village women should be restricted to kitchen, do household chores, wear a ghunghat and speak in a low voice.

This is a dialogue between a few naughty crowds at school who tease the two sisters verbally.

### Extract 7

*Friends at school and Geeta.*

Friends at school:

Since you both started wrestling, your walk also has become very *manly*.

Wonder what else will happen?

Geeta:

Next it will be my fist on your face.

Geeta and Babita attain a different style in their walk as they underwent training in becoming wrestlers. This walking style was criticized by few of their school friends. They commented on their walk stating that they walk like boys and wondered what more they had to witness in both the sisters. While Babita doesn't react to their comments, Geeta reacts strongly warning them that she doesn't mind trying one of her strong punches on their faces. Wrestling taught these sisters to look beyond their own classrooms and gave them strength to see themselves beyond being just any other normal girl.

This is a conversation between Daya and Mahavir at their residence.

### Extract 8

*DayaShobha (D) and Mahavir Singh Phogat (M).*

At Mahavir's residence

D:

The entire village is laughing at us. Who will marry our *girls*?

M:

I will make our *girls* so capable that *boys* will not choose them. They will choose *boys*!

The nature of mother and her sensitivity to the gossips of the villagers on her girls troubles her and hence expresses her worry to her husband on the marriage of their daughters. Her husband answers her very smartly and assures her that he will make their girls so capable that instead of boys choosing them, their daughters themselves will choose boys. It is amazing to see a father stand for his girls where we understand and believe that a girl is no less than a boy!

This is the scene which transforms the lives of Geeta and Babita when they listen to their friend Sunitha's comments on their father at her wedding.

### Extract 9

*Sunitha (Geeta and Babita's friend).*

### Sunitha

The reality here is: the moment a *girl* is born, they teach her to cook and clean, make her do all the household chores and, once she turns 14, marry her off, get rid of the burden, and hand her over to a man whom she has never seen before, make her bear children and raise them – that's all she is good for.

We can find this ninth extract to be the turning point which sets both the sisters to discover their future and take wrestling seriously in their lives. Sunitha plays a pivotal role in making the girls realise their father's efforts towards their career. This dialogue of Sunitha allows them to see how lucky they are to have a father like Mahavir. They realised his care for them when he didn't marry them off at a younger age, but stood with them against all the odds, breaking the social barriers.

At first, the Organiser of the Wrestling competition humiliates Mahavir but later changes his mind and allows Geeta to take part in the wrestling competition along with the boys.

**Extract 10**

Competition Organizer (CO), Mahavir Singh Phogat (M), Audience, Committee member, Commentator, Person 1, Person 2, Person 3, Referee and Geeta.

Competition Organizer:

You will make a *girl* wrestle?

M:

Yes, so?

Audience:

People laugh.

CO:

Sir, the day I organize a cooking competition, that day you get your Geeta (*girl*). This is a wrestling competition.

Committee member:

In a town that has never seen a *girl* wrestle, when a *girl* wrestles a *boy* how many people will come to watch wrestling?

Commentator:

You must have seen a *girl* walk on fire, eat a snake but today for the first time in the history of Rohtak, see a *girl* wrestling a *boy* in a competition.

A wrestling *girl* for just ₹ 2/-

Person 1:

Will she fight in these clothes?

Person 2:

She looks hot!

Person 3:

Hope her T- shirt doesn't tear.

Referee:

Go easy for she is a *girl*.

Geeta:

Don't make that mistake.

Mahavir wishes to make Geeta wrestle against boys. So he takes her to the wrestling competition but the organiser humiliates him saying, 'Sir, the day I organize a cooking competition, that day you get Geeta (*girl*). This is a wrestling competition.' People around the organiser laugh and make fun of Mahavir and plead him to leave. The negative ethos/psyche of the people in the society curbs women's rights, dreams and their goals. This type of mind-set can be observed in the organiser. But in no time, a committee member suggests the organiser to look beyond the competition and to consider the collections they would get if the villagers knew that a girl is participating in the

competition. So, the commentator announces stating that for the first time in the history of Rohtak, they can watch a *girl* wrestling a *boy* in a live competition. The fare was just Rs 2/- only for that match. Hence humongous audience turned up to watch the interesting wrestling match. The people in the audience mocked the girl's dress and her body. The referee asked Geeta to select her opponent to wrestle against and when she selects a boy named Jassi who was strong, well-built amidst the weak, puny and young boys present for wrestling competition. He instructs Jassi to be easy on her because she is a girl. But Geeta immediately warns Jassi not to commit such a mistake. The audience, Mahavir, Babita and Omkar cheered for Geeta and though Geeta lost to Jassi she was given special prize money of Rs. 50/- for being a tough competitor.

**Conclusion**

It is high time the society responds positively to gender equality by paving a path for the future girls to follow the paths of Geeta and Babita who not only defeated the belief systems of the ignorant villagers, but triumphed in their real lives inspiring the younger generation to pursue their dreams.

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